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A Tribute to the Women: Rewriting History, Retelling Herstory in Civil Rights

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Much of the scholarship on the modern Civil Rights Movement (CRM) has recaptured dramatic and poignant events through eyewitness accounts and oral narratives—from letters, speeches, newspaper editorials, press releases, photographs, and documentary films that summon vivid images of fire hoses and police dogs, peaceful protestors, and violent rioters (McAdam 1982; Morris 1984; Payne 1994; Robnett 1997; Williams 1988). The conventional approach to (or master narrative of) civil rights history has focused almost exclusively on extraordinary, elite men from W.E.B. DuBois to Martin Luther King Jr. and Thurgood Marshall to such notable civil rights organizations as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)—that led the fight for equal protection under the law, desegregated lunch counters, and the right to vote in local and national elections (Branch 1988, 1998, 2006; Carson 1981; Fairclough 1987; Garrow 1986; Lewis 1993; Reed 1997; Sullivan 2009). Rather than broaden and deepen our understanding of individual and collective forms of resistance, however,

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such an approach simplifies and distorts a more nuanced and complicated version of civil rights history in the United States. All too often people come to associate the modern CRM with celebrated heroes and a static, fixed understanding of discrimination that is less than critical of hierarchal relationships determined solely (or primarily) by a racial caste system—specifically, an era of Jim Crow when "separate but equal" accommodations were legally sanctioned by the Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. Far less common is an association of the modern CRM with a richer, more nuanced understanding of discrimination that is critical of hierarchal relationships determined by interlocking systems of oppression—namely, racism and sexism—experienced by forgotten heroines who similarly risked their lives and reputations for equality and justice before the law (notable exceptions being Collier-Thomas and Franklin 2001; Giddings 1984; Gilmore 1996; Ling and Monteith 2004; Olson 2001; Robnett 1997).

Rather than sidestep or avoid some of the most vexing and controversial issues inherent to the modern CRM, we intend to offer a more comprehensive account of power dynamics as evidenced in the lives of well- and lesser-known female actors. By moving from the first tier of notable female activists to those unsung women whose participation and leadership were embedded in the daily struggle, we disentangle women's diverse and multifaceted roles in an attempt to broaden the scope of civil rights leadership. Additional theorizing is necessary to uncover the processes by which leaders with intersecting subordinate identities—specifically, African-American women—are either made invisible or misrepresented in civil rights history. While many studies acknowledge the key role of women's involvement, they often assign them a kind of secondary or supportive role. By identifying women as either behind-the-scenes activists or helpmates, much of the master narrative obscures the various leadership experiences of women who participated in the movement on a local and national level—and highlights their collective versus individual efforts to strategically plan, mobilize, and execute tactical strategies on the ground.

METHOD: DATA AND ARCHIVAL SOURCES

The present study draws upon a rich array of scholarly sources from newspaper and journal articles to oral interviews and special archived collections to examine contextual cues indicative of the civil rights era,

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generally, and to interrogate the interpersonal interactions and legal practices that situated and constrained female actors differently than others who actively participated in the movement, specifically. Using qualitative (or interpretive) methods, the intersectional approach used here traverses traditional disciplinary boundaries between the humanities (history) and social sciences (political science) without sacrificing the analytical richness and the interpretive achievements gained by reading texts like field notes or transcribed interviews for the purpose of rewriting a historical narrative that further elucidates the civil rights context and provides an enhanced explanation for different (or varied) movement experiences for female change agents. Our analysis draws from the Martin Luther King Estate Collection and the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University for speeches and congressional files, oral interviews, newspaper clippings, and other supplemental materials to inform it. The concept of structural intersectionality is used to frame our analysis and so, it is to a discussion of its meaning that we now turn.

THEORETICAL FRAME: STRUCTURAL INTERSECTIONALITY

It has been nearly two decades since Kimberle Crenshaw introduced the term "intersectionality" in her groundbreaking essay, "Beyond Racism and Misogyny: Black Feminism and 2 Live Crew" (1997), but it continues to make visible power relations that have profound effects on the way history happens and the way it is remembered. Crenshaw suggested that "[a]ny particular disadvantage or disability is sometimes compounded by yet another disadvantage emanating from or reflecting the dynamics of a separate system of subordination. An analysis sensitive to structural intersections explores the lives of those at the bottom of multiple hierarchies to determine how the dynamics of each hierarchy exacerbates and compounds the consequences of another" (1997: 552–53). Correspondingly, we "look to the bottom" for the purpose of paying tribute to the women by retelling herstory in civil rights history. Our analysis of structural intersectionality suggests that racial-sexual violence occurred within a specific historical moment and that individual experiences with suffering (or victimhood) varied considerably depending on race, class, and gender dynamics. These constraints can be better understood and addressed through an intersectional approach that links them to broader structural conditions that overlap in fairly predictable ways, especially in the civil rights context—for example, the

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way in which gender subordination manifests in this case via verbal assault and sexual harassment on city busses in Montgomery and how that intersects with race and class disadvantage to shape and limit the opportunities for effective legal strategies. Mary Hawkesworth (2003) has argued that such a theoretical approach is necessary to uncover the process by which race-gendering occurs—that is, through the actions of individuals, laws, policies, and organizational norms and practices. The term "race-gendering" attempts to foreground the interactions of racialization and gendering as they produce social hierarchies that reify dominant and subordinate categories of difference. The manifold practices from silencing to insulting and segregating through which race-gendering occurs are complex and layered, as they serve to fix women of color "in their place." Thus, the concept of structural intersectionality can serve as a theoretical tool to critically examine women's roles in the civil rights movement and to expose bias in scholarship that has rendered women invisible or obscured their leadership.

EXPANDING WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE MOVEMENT: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941–1965 (Crawford, Rouse, and Woods 1990) and *Sisters in the Struggle: African-American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (Collier-Thomas and Franklin 2001) remain the most cited and widely read works on women and the CRM. They both attend to gender dynamics evidenced in the lives of individual activists through thick description and biographical essays. Neither collection, however, focuses explicitly on leadership per se. For years, women's movement experience and theories of leadership remained relatively unexplored (with notable exceptions being Barnett 1993; Gilmore 1996; and Sacks 1988). Newer scholarship, beginning with Belinda Robnett's (1997) seminal work, paved the way for broader definitions and reappraisals of women's leadership during the modern civil rights era. As a result, women's leadership was conceived as more complex and multilayered, involving intermediary positions.

In *How Long? How Long? African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights*, Robnett (1997) distinguished the "formal" leaders of the movement, who were almost always men, from the grassroots or "bridge" leaders, who were primarily, although not always, women. Relying on

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narrated accounts from participants themselves, Robnett identified gender as a construct of exclusion that helped develop a critical bridge between the formal organization and adherents as well as potential constituents. While African-American women, for the most part, did not hold formal titled leadership positions, Robnett maintained that this should in no way obscure the fact that they performed specific leadership tasks in the recruitment and mobilization process. Christina Greene (2005) makes this point clear in *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham*. She argues that African-American women in Durham, North Carolina, took the lead in desegregating public facilities, fighting for equal employment opportunities and attempting to alleviate poverty via traditional and unconventional resistance strategies—legal challenges, pickets, strikes, sit-ins, duplicity, and acting "crazy." They drew on formal and informal support networks from family and neighbors to church and civic organizations in an effort to challenge racial segregation and economic injustice. In *Invisible Activists: Women of the Louisiana NAACP and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, Lee Sartain (2007) puts forth an equally compelling argument that the tireless efforts of local women kept the Louisiana NAACP afloat. Emphasizing their abilities to canvass vast neighborhoods and combine fund-raising skills with community networks and family ties, he shows how women who qualified as leaders and followers as well as foot soldiers and grassroots organizers worked collaboratively to support voter registration, equal job opportunities, and school desegregation. Both Greene and Sartain expand upon Robnett's theory of bridge leadership by showing that women performed pivotal roles behind the scenes as well as the daily direct-action work necessary to sustain a movement.

The edited collection, *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (Gore, Theoharis, and Woodard 2009), highlights the limits of such a concept as bridge leadership. The editors demonstrate how women's leadership took many forms, including that of the traditional charismatic leader, in an attempt to move away from any singular framework of black women's leadership. The authors spotlight radical Black women who worked collaboratively with others on issues of race, gender, class, and sexual discrimination within the civil rights, the Black Left, Black Power, and women's movements. Contributors identify the material consequences of these overlapping group memberships as they link the interaction between multiple hierarchies with the structural conditions of subordination—for example, the burden of poverty and unemployment, simultaneously.

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New scholarship on the CRM is moving toward a more comprehensive and intersectional understanding of women's experiences in the freedom struggle. For example, Danielle L. McGuire insists that women's historical agency and collective responses to sexual violence necessitate the rewriting of civil rights history. In her book, *At the Dark End of the Street* (2010), she draws attention to the mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, and witnesses who used testimony as a form of direct action to expose and challenge a ritual of white-on-black rape and other forms of racialized sexual violence in existence since slavery. Their testimonies inspired grassroots campaigns for justice and human dignity that helped spark pivotal movements like the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott and the 1975 struggle to Free Joan Little. McGuire's argument that the long struggle for African-American women's bodily integrity served as a catalyst for the modern CRM expands our understanding of their sexual vulnerability in a racial caste system. It also challenges popular notions that the fight for women's liberation occurred largely outside of the African-American freedom struggle and with little engagement from Black women who felt they had to choose their race over their gender.

Women's unique experiences in the movement are also central to the new book, *Hands on the Freedom Plough: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC* (Holsaert et al. 2010). It features a remarkable cross section of 52 personal oral histories written from bottom-up perspectives by female veterans of SNCC who worked on freedom's frontlines. Black and white women desegregated lunch counters, challenged segregation in public transportation, and worked as field organizers canvassing rural voters in the most dangerous counties of Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia. While some contributors write about having been relegated to traditionally female jobs like taking notes or filing papers, they also faced the most tremendous obstacles. For example, they were jailed, beaten, threatened with racial and sexual violence, and treated with cruelty—making them both larger-than-life heroines and poignantly complicated human beings willing to sacrifice their bodies and their lives for equality and justice. To consider them simply as helpmates or even as "bridge leaders" is a disservice to the history they made.

By critically evaluating the ways in which historians and activists have interpreted and communicated civil rights history, Emilye Crosby (2011), in *Civil Rights History from the Ground up: Local Struggles, A National Movement*, shifts the scholarly gaze away from national public figures to local grassroots warriors to emphasize the complexity of leadership within the civil rights movement. African-American women

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served as public speakers, block leaders, community organizers, influencers, and movement managers. While some activist women worked outside the spotlight like Ella Baker, who was arguably one of the most important political and social forces within the African-American freedom struggle, and Septima Clark, whose unyielding devotion to education and citizenship fueled ordinary people's participation in the movement, it would be folly to suggest they were merely "bridges" or simply toiled "behind the scenes" (Charron 2009; Ransby 2002). These women—and others like them—did the essential tasks of community organizing, without which there may not have been a civil rights movement. Still, a number of women operated as public spokespersons or "traditional" leaders, like Daisy Bates in Arkansas and Gloria Richardson in Cambridge. In other words, movement leadership came in many forms and contexts.

However, if we are to fully comprehend the multifaceted roles that women played in the CRM, we must grapple with the less common roles of women alongside the more typical experiences behind the scenes when both realities are the product of choices influenced by race, class, and gender dynamics indicative of the era. This requires contextualizing different movement experiences in such a way that is "race-gendered" as we retell herstory in civil rights. Scholars of the movement should work to interrogate different experiences while being attentive to power hierarchies and, at the same time, demonstrate how African-American women exerted influence and shaped the larger civil rights movement.

Telling Histories: Gender Bias in the Movement

As long as scholars continue to mischaracterize female activists as victims of solely (or primarily) racial oppression who served behind the scenes or as "bridges" between male "leaders," our popular understanding of the CRM will remain incomplete, and we will lose sight of the important role played by women in one of the 20th century's most important social movements. To be sure, the project at hand offers an important corrective. By interrogating the essentialist notion that African-Americans in general and African-American women in particular were oppressed in the same way during the civil rights era, this essay departs from conventional, mainstream approaches by arguing that they all too often accentuate the subordinate status of female activists vis-à-vis male activists

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by reinforcing prevailing notions about the appropriate sexual division of labor and traditional gender roles. It is in this regard that the popular master narrative, which suggests that African-American men led on the frontlines and that African-American women were helpmates on the sidelines, becomes most illustrative. Such a popular master narrative ignores the fact that African-American women were often rejected as public spokespersons and disregarded for high-profile leadership positions in organizations like the SCLC and the NAACP because of their own organizational gender biases. Indeed, those positions were almost always reserved for African-American men, particularly ministers.

In other words, Black women had to deal with sexism and gender bias within the movement as well as the larger society. In "We Wanted the Voice of A Woman to Be Heard," Dorothy Height recalled the ways in which African-American women were purposely excluded from direct participation among the lineup of speakers at the 1963 March on Washington (Collier-Thomas and Franklin 2001). While Daisy Bates—"that great champion of Negro Rights," as A. Philip Randolph put it—was allowed to speak, she was granted only one minute. African-American women were relegated to the background as musical entertainers when Marian Anderson and Mahalia Jackson provided live performances.[1] Still others were granted prime seating near the stage and asked to stand so that all those present at the March might pay tribute to "Negro Women Fighters for Freedom"—namely, the widows of Medgar Evers and Herbert Lee—and other notable female activists like Diane Nash Bevel, Rosa Parks, and Gloria Richardson. As noted on the official program, male organizers assigned these women secondary roles as "honorees," not equal participants despite the fact that many of them were indispensable to the movement (Collier-Thomas and Franklin 2001; Olsen 2001). Rosa Parks and Daisy Bates, for example, had been radical activists since the early 1940s in Montgomery, Alabama, and Little Rock, Arkansas, (McGuire 2010). Diane Nash helped lead the sit-in movement in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1960 was one of the founders of SNCC, and in 1961 she helped rescue the Freedom Rides after racial violence in Birmingham nearly derailed the campaign (Arsenault 2006). Gloria Richardson was the leader of the Cambridge Nonviolent Action Committee in Maryland (Collier-Thomas and Franklin 2001). Thus the

1. "The March Begins," transcript. Open Vault: WGBH Media Library and Archives, WGBH Educational Foundation. http://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/march-592217-the-march-begins (accessed September 6, 2013).

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women chosen to stand silently before a quarter-million Americans that sweltering August day were neither saintly symbols of segregation nor victims in need of male protection. Their leadership was rooted in hard-fought campaigns for justice, not historic happenstance.

This silencing of female leaders was not unusual, especially in national civil rights organizations like the NAACP or the SCLC. In Montgomery, Alabama, NAACP leaders did not invite Rosa Parks or Jo Ann Robinson, leader of the militant Women's Political Council who organized and launched the 1955–56 bus boycott, to the meeting where the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was formed with Martin Luther King Jr. as its president. It was not until the first mass meeting at the Holt Street Baptist Church on December 5, 1955, that Robinson realized her leadership had been subverted by the male ministers and activists. "The men took it over," she said. They had "definitely decided to assume leadership" (Garrow 1989, 570; McGuire 2010; Robinson 1987, 64). That did not stop Robinson from running things, however. Indeed, she was the chief strategist and negotiator for the boycott, and her living room served as the boycott's nerve center. In 1956, an oral historian from Fisk University recognized Robinson's crucial role. In his notes he wrote, "[T]he public recognizes King as *the* leader, but I wonder if Mrs. Robinson may be of equal importance."[2]

Rosa Parks faced similar treatment. Despite the fact that she was, as historian J. Mills Thornton put it, "more actively involved in the struggle against racial discrimination, and more knowledgeable about efforts being made to eliminate it, than all but a tiny handful of the city's forty-five thousand black citizens," she did not speak at the boycott's first mass meeting (Thornton 2002, 60). Just before she was presented to the standing-room-only crowd, she asked Reverend E.N. French if the ministers wanted her to speak. French told her that she "[had] said enough and you don't have to speak."[3] Instead of lauding Rosa Parks' long history of activism and militancy—of her work defending the Scottsboro Boys in the 1930s, organizing to secure justice for rape survivors in the 1940s, or the voter registration workshops she and her husband hosted after World War II, she was presented to the audience as a silent but saintly victim of segregation (McGuire 2010). From that day

2. Rufus Lewis, interview by Donald T. Ferron, January 20, 1956, folder 7, box 3, Preston and Bonita Valien Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

3. Transcript, "Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church," December 5, 1955. MLK Estate Collection, copy online at http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/mia_mass_meeting_at_holt_street_baptist_church/ (accessed June 5, 2014).

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forward, Rosa Parks's radicalism was all but erased as she became a simplistic symbol—a woman who, as one of her many eulogists put it in 2005, "sat down in order that we might stand up" (Shipp 2005).

Racial-Sexual Harassment and Violence in the Freedom Movement

Worse, Rosa Parks's long history of defending Black women's right to bodily integrity was completely forgotten, making her defiance of bus segregation a purely racial issue. Indeed, protest against racial segregation was but one of the key issues during the bus boycott; gendered and racialized sexual violence were just as important, if not *the* primary focus of Black women in Montgomery. Besides the daily indigities of Jim Crow, buses were also sites of sexual violence, particularly for domestics and other working-class Black women like Parks, for whom public transportation was not optional. Bus drivers had police power and kept blackjacks and pistols under their seats. They assaulted and sometimes even killed African-Americans who refused to abide by the racial order of Jim Crow. Most of their vile was directed at the Black women who rode the buses daily. Having served as secretary of the Montgomery NAACP since 1943, Rosa Parks bore witness to and investigated many instances of violence on the buses (McGuire 2010).

In complaints to Attorney Fred Gray, the NAACP, members of the Women's Political Council, and at trials during the boycott, African-American women testified that bus drivers hurled nasty, sexualized insults at them, touched them inappropriately and physically abused them (McGuire 2010; Yeaky 1979). Gladys Moore said bus drivers treat Black women "just as rough as could be. I mean not like we are human, but like we are some kind of animal." Georgia Gilmore testified that a driver screamed at her after she boarded in the front of the bus. "Come out, nigger," he said, "and go in the back door." When she stepped out and walked to the back, the driver pulled away, leaving her at the curb. Henrietta Brimson recalled a bus driver who "had a nasty habit of calling [black women] everything—cows, heifers, etc."[4] Ferdie Walker testified that a bus driver regularly harassed her as she waited on the corner. "The bus was up high," she said. "and the street was down low. They'd drive up ... and expose themselves while I was standing there and it just scared me to death" (Chafe, Gavins, and Korstadt 2001, 9).

4. Transcript, *State of Alabama v. M.L. King Jr.*, March 19–22, 1956, folder 3, box 3, Preston and Bonita Valien Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

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Mistreatment on the buses, historian Paula Giddings argued, "represented the final insult and humiliation to black women in a society run by white men" (Giddings 1984, 262). Fed up with the abuse, working-class African-American women, who made up the majority of the Montgomery Line's ridership, fought back by staging a boycott. Rosa Parks understood that her arrest was a catalyst, but that women walked for their own reasons. They "had gone through similarly shameful experiences," she said. "Some worse than mine" (Burns 1997, 86). It is no surprise, then, that African-American women organized and led the bus boycott. Erna Dungee Allen, the MIA's financial secretary, recalled that women were the "power behind the throne." They were, she said, "really the ones who carried out the actions. When all the dust settled, the women were there when it cleared. They were there in the positions to hold the MIA together. The little day to day things, taking care of the finances, things like that," Dungee said, "the women [took] care of that" (Garrow 1989, 522–23).

Working- and middle-class Black women also filled the pews at the weekly mass meetings, raised most of the local funds for the boycott, organized and drove in the car pool system, and walked for 381 days. "The maids, the cooks, they were the ones that really and truly kept the buses running," Georgia Gilmore said. "And after the maids and cooks stopped riding the bus," she said, "well, the bus didn't have any need to run" (Hampton and Fayer 1990, 29). Mrs. A.W. West argued that the "working people" kept the movement going. "The leaders could do nothing by themselves. They are only the voice of thousands of colored workers."[5] Without Black women's leadership, organization, and participation, the boycott would have failed. And yet, the boycott is almost always told as a male-led—or rather, King-led, movement. By taking an intersectional approach to the Montgomery movement, what appears instead is a "collective, cross-class collaboration" of women who led and sustained a movement against not only racial segregation, but also *for* human dignity and bodily integrity (Greer 2004). Historical focus on formal leaders, especially male ministers like Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph Abernathy, obscured these women's indispensable roles and relegated them to the footnotes of history.

5. Mrs. A.W. West, interview by Willie M. Lee, January 23, 1956, folder 4, box 4, Preston and Bonita Valien Papers.

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The "Power Behind the Throne"

CRM organizer Ella Baker understood at a young age that "there were only certain things that women, especially black women could do." But throughout her life, she defied societal expectations about gender and refused to, as Barbara Ransby put it, "play the role of the silent helper to the prominent male leaders with whom she was associated, from Walter White in the NAACP during the 1940s to Martin Luther King in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in the 1950s" (Ransby 2002, 184). Baker complained that the male leaders of SCLC took her and other female staffers for granted and did not treat them as equals. Despite the fact that for many years she was the beating heart of the SCLC, organizing and overseeing all its campaigns, facilitating development of local branches, and developing plans for mass action and voter registration campaigns, she was never given a formal title. Instead, the SCLC called her the "acting" or "interim" director. Baker knew that the male ministers who made up the SCLC, including Dr. King, viewed women as "subordinates and helpmates." They were more comfortable, she said, talking to women about "how well they cooked, and how beautiful they looked," than speaking with them as equals (Ransby 2002, 184).

Baker finally left the SCLC in the fall of 1960 to help facilitate the development and growth of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), an organization that grew out of the student sit-in movement that spring. SNCC members embraced a radical democratic vision of change and leadership that was in stark contrast to the main movement leaders, who were predominately male and middle-class. Instead, SNCC welcomed and helped nurture those who, because of their gender or class, had been rendered unfit for formal leadership roles.

It was this fertile ground that enabled Fannie Lou Hamer's grassroots leadership to take root. Hamer was a 44-year-old timekeeper on a plantation in Ruleville, Mississippi, who became a successful organizer and field secretary for the SNCC, worked for the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), ran for local office, gave speeches around the country, and cofounded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). Despite orchestrating tremendously successful grassroots campaigns in Mississippi that attested to her organizing capabilities and advanced Black liberation, especially among the poor and working class, members of the college-educated, professional segment of the African-American movement community often shunned her (Hamlet 1996). At

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a time when middle-class feminine respectability was widely accepted as an important tool of protest, Hamer stood apart. She dropped out of school at the age of twelve, worked full-time as a sharecropper on a rural plantation, and lived in a small frame house with no running water (Lee 1999).

Given her militancy and salt-of-the earth appearance and background, the upper echelon of male movement leadership was willing to use her, for example, as a symbolic victim of white supremacist terror at the 1964 Democratic Convention but was not ready to recognize her grassroots organizing abilities or welcome her into the leadership ranks outside her home state (Branch 1998; Hamlet 1996). Indeed, her stark testimony of a brutal, sexualized, racist beating in the Winona, Mississippi, jail a year earlier made her the "knockout witness" of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party delegation, but her willingness to discuss Black women's sexual vulnerability in the Jim Crow South may have also marked her as unfit for formal leadership (Branch 1998, 462). At the convention, Hamer told party delegates and a nationwide television audience how she was returning from a voter registration workshop when local police arrested her and her female colleagues and took them to jail. Two inmates, she said, beat her with a blackjack, while patrolmen hit her in the head and tried to pull her dress over her head. When she tried to cover up, she said, a white officer "walked over and he pulled my dress back, back up." "All of this is on account we want to register, to become first-class citizens. And if the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America . . ." (Branch 1998, 461; Lee 1999; Selby and Selby 1971). When she finished the emotional testimony, she wiped the tears from her eyes and said, "I felt just like I was telling it from the mountain. That's why I like that song 'Go Tell it On the Mountain.' I feel like I'm talking to the world" (Branch 1998, 461). Her humble pride turned to anger when she found out later that President Lyndon B. Johnson called an impromptu press conference during her testimony, to purposely divert media attention away from her. Worse, while the Credentials Committee was debating the merits of Hamer's and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's appeal, male movement leaders met with the President's men in a closed meeting to work out a compromise. Of course, Hamer and other working-class and poor grassroots activists from Mississippi were not invited. Hamer's experience taught her that national leaders and movement officials were two-faced and condescending toward poor Blacks, whom they thought were unable to think for themselves and should not be able to direct movement

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activities or serve as leaders (Lee 1999). But Mrs. Hamer had other ideas. In 1965 at a COFO convention, she issued a stern rebuttal to national NAACP leaders Roy Wilkins and Gloster Current: "How much have the people with suits done? If they, dressed up, had been here [in Mississippi], then the kids in jeans wouldn't be here. Preachers and teachers look down on little people, but now these little people are speaking up..." (Lee 1999, 116).

Both Baker's and Hamer's experiences with male movement leaders speak to the gender politics of the time as well as to the gendered and classed bias of civil rights history, which beg the question, was it just Fannie Lou Hamer's lower-class status that turned off the spokesmen of the national NAACP, or did her willingness to discuss black women's sexual vulnerability in the Jim Crow South also mark her as unfit for formal leadership? On the other hand, was it that same willingness to speak openly about sexualized racial terror (among other things) that helped make Hamer such an effective local leader and influencer? Hamer did not shy away from subjects typically deemed off-limits or unsuitable for respectable audiences. For example, her frank testimony of her own forced sterilization, something so common among black women in the Deep South that it was often referred to as the "Mississippi appendectomy," helped bring national attention to the special vulnerabilities of Black women in the Jim Crow South (Lee 1999; Roberts 1998). Indeed, the racial-sexual assault of Fannie Lou Hamer in the Winona jail cell illustrates how racism, sexism, and often class dynamics intersected and profoundly affected the lives of African-American women during the modern civil rights era.

First and foremost, Hamer and her fellow activists lacked the protection of class privilege. Like the women who boycotted the buses in Montgomery in 1955–56, neither Hamer nor her companions (who were also beaten in Winona) had access to a privately owned automobile. Instead, they relied upon public transportation. Second, they lacked the gendered protection provided by masculinity—that is, a range of factors that correlate with increased vulnerability: youth, small stature (or size), and physical weakness. Third, given the gender-specific stereotype of African-American women as so morally loose that they are impossible to rape, Black women were especially vulnerable to state-sanctioned sexual violence that historically had been used as a weapon of terror during slavery and Reconstruction (Higginbotham 1992; McGuire 2010; Simien 2011; Welke 1995). All things considered, Black women paid dearly for transgressing Jim Crow in the segregated South.

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Given the circumstances described above, race alone does not fully explain why the officers raised Hamer's dress or why bus drivers in Montgomery ridiculed Black women's bodies or touched them inappropriately (Lee 1999). The combined (or interactive) effect of these abuses made it possible for white male law enforcement officers and others in positions of power to practice misogyny with racial specificity and define the terms under which these women were tortured with inhumane cruelty. To be sure, it is hard to deny the sexual aspect and explain the abuse of Hamer and others by a single, analytic category as race when surely the very real threat of rape for women must have instilled a sense of fear and profound helplessness. The violence that occurred in the lives of Hamer and other Black women was not simply linked to racial oppression. It was also intricately connected to other forms of oppression—sexism and classism—and the corresponding ideological justifications that influenced these incidences of violence. In Hamer's case and in myriad others scattered throughout the civil rights era—in Montgomery, Birmingham, Selma, and everywhere white supremacy reigned—white male law enforcement officers, bus drivers, physicians, and others in positions of power expressed racial animus and enforced white supremacy via sexual and racial violence (McGuire 2010). That so many Black women risked their lives and livelihoods to protest this system and worked to overturn it is a testament to not only their strength and courage, but also to their abilities as leaders, organizers, and influencers. That their *full* stories are often not included in the history of the civil rights movement is also a testament to the necessity of an intersectional approach. And so, we ask, how might the history of the civil rights movement change if historians focused on structural intersectionality and presented a history that takes different movement experiences based on the above identity categories into consideration? How might those stories reveal more about black women's leadership and experiences within the Black freedom struggle?

CONCLUSION

Using structural intersectionality as a theoretical framework to avoid an oversimplified, singular analysis of oppression, we have focused on the dynamic interplay between race, class, and gender in determining the variance in power associated with multiple group identity and real-life experiences during the civil rights era. The concept of intersectionality,

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generally, is particularly adept at capturing and theorizing the simultaneity of oppression, which gives rise to qualitatively different movement experiences. Such an approach makes visible the complex nature of mutually constitutive identities and the historical contexts that structure the lives of lesser and well-known female activists during the modern civil rights era. Intersecting identities create instances of both opportunity and oppression, where an individual can, depending on the context, experience advantage, disadvantage, or both at the same time. By taking into account the ways in which female activists either accepted or rejected normative ideals of womanhood (or respectability), intersectionality attends to the process of enacting and understanding multiple group identity as it informs, predicts, or otherwise determines movement experiences that mainstream accounts or "master narratives" of civil rights history omit. An intersectional approach can also fundamentally change master narratives of the movement as well. For example, the Montgomery bus boycott becomes not just a protest against segregated seating, but a movement by women for bodily integrity and human dignity.

This project is unique in the way in which it situates multiply disadvantaged actors within a framework of structural intersectionality, merging it with the social and cultural history of the modern civil rights era. We are unaware of similar work that critically examines such notable events during the CRM in this way, assuming that race and gender are mutually constitutive and relational. The stories that get told and remain hidden about women in the movement intrigue us. Fannie Lou Hamer alone is remembered as having faced torture and abuse—*not* her companions. It is her story of courage that has been recalled by collective memory, which has been essential to constructing an image of the strong black woman, facing martyrdom—a necessary ingredient for memorialization. It is, in fact, easy to portray Hamer as a leader who suffered for her people under the most extreme duress. Indeed, this is the very image movement leaders hoped for by presenting her as a victim at the Democratic National Convention in 1964. The creation of Hamer as an iconic symbol of the stereotypical "strong black woman" requires various modes of remembering and forgetting. The process of immortalization demands a selective representation of her activist career and moral character in order to build a lasting image as an enduring symbol and normative source of inspiration; but this version of her history leaves out more than it includes and limits our understanding of her experience. The same could be said about Rosa Parks. Popular

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history hails her as a silent seamstress who tiptoed into history instead of a radical whose devotion to racial justice and human dignity lasted for nearly seventy years. Her work investigating interracial rape cases and defending black women who were sexually abused or assaulted is all but invisible in master narratives of the movement, as is her work on behalf of the poor and working class in Detroit, where she lived from 1957 until she died in 2005 (McGuire 2010; Theoharis 2013). An intersectional approach would help us learn more about the iconic female leaders we *think* we know, as well as flesh out a herstory of the civil rights movement that renders myriad forms of women's experiences and leadership visible.

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